



The President's Daily Brief

17 May 1971

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THE PRESIDENT'S DAILY BRIEF

17 May 1971

PRINCIPAL DEVELOPMENTS

Communist attacks in Laos have forced the abandonment of a number of government bases on the Bolovens Plateau. (Page 1)

Developments in Egypt are discussed on Page 3.

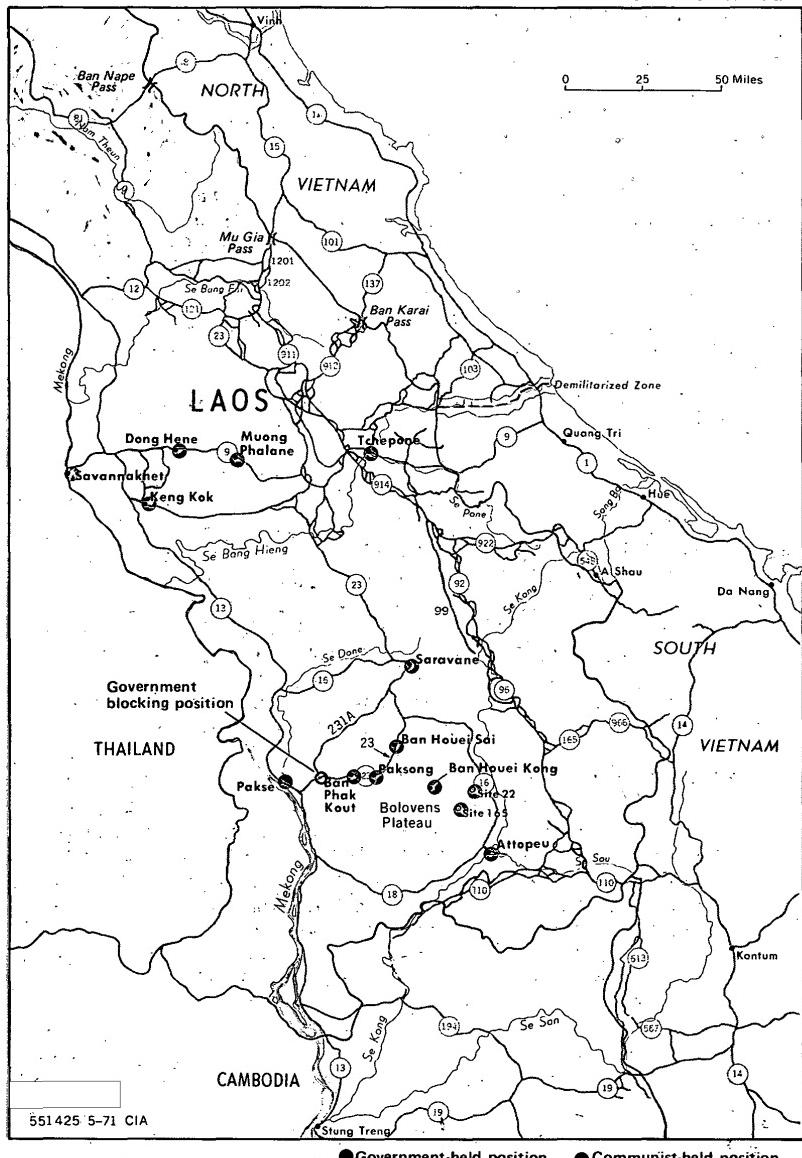
The Communist Chinese are making an effort to cultivate the Malaysians and Filipinos. (Page 4)

The Pakistani Army is reported to be pursuing a policy of extermination against Hindus in East Pakistan. (Page 5)

A Soviet submarine tender appears headed toward the Caribbean. (Page 6)

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Communist Gains on the Bolovens Plateau



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LAOS

A series of sharp coordinated Communist attacks on 16 May forced the government to abandon a number of strategically located bases on the Bolovens Plateau. Among the positions lost were Ban Houei Sai, which guarded the northern approaches to the plateau, and Ban Phak Kout, whose loss cuts land access to Paksong town via Route 23. So far, no attack has been reported against Ban Houei Kong; the last major irregular base on the plateau, but Communist troops have been seen in the vicinity.

At last report, Communist troops have captured Paksong itself and the government defenders were forced to abandon their positions nearby. Reinforcements are being moved in from Pakse [redacted]

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[redacted] to establish blocking positions at the junction of Routes 23 and 23IA. This is the first time the Communists have hit Paksong, the largest population center on the Bolovens, although it has been cited as a possible target for several years.

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The Bolovens has been relatively quiet since February and March, when the Communists forced government irregulars to abandon bases on the eastern rim overlooking the Se Kong infiltration corridor. A renewed offensive has been expected for several weeks, but government commanders thought there might be further delays because of recent Pathet Lao defections in the area.

The current drive is the latest phase of a general campaign in the Bolovens area that began in 1968 when the Communists re-entered the Se Done Valley and cut off the provincial capital of Saravane. Since then the Communists have taken Saravane, Attapeu, and other government positions around the edge of the plateau while eroding the government's once firm control of the Bolovens itself.

It is still too early to tell whether the present Bolovens offensive is part of a developing wider offensive in south Laos. Reinforced Communist units have been increasingly active along Route 9, where they are currently threatening the government

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towns of Dong Hene and Keng Kok. Such an offensive presumably would be designed to drive government troops farther from the Communists' infiltration corridor, perhaps as a belated response to irregular harassment operations during Lam Son 719. The Communists launched a ground assault against Dong Hene early today but it is not yet clear whether this is anything more than a probing action.

The coincidence of the attacks in the south with the recent Communist-proposed cease-fire raises the possibility that a southern offensive would have political objectives as well. The Communists might hope that a threat in the south would increase pressure on the government to negotiate on their terms. The short-term impact, however, is likely to have the opposite effect. Prime Minister Souvanna is likely to react negatively to the Communist military pressure in a letter he is preparing to send Pathet Lao leader Souphanouvong later this week.

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EGYPT

All of the principals in the purge, as well as a number of members of the Arab Socialist Union and lesser government officials, are reported to have been jailed or placed under house arrest.

The opening of investigations by Egyptian authorities yesterday tend to confirm earlier indications that Sadat plans to bring to trial some of those deposed. With his swift action, Sadat has squelched any countermoves from his opponents, and his position, at least in the short run, appears to have been strengthened.

War Minister Sadiq's prompt pledge of the military's support suggests that Sadat had the tacit blessing of the armed forces before his decisive moves last Thursday. One of the purposes of his trip to the canal zone on 11-12 May may have been to ensure the indispensable backing of his key command-level officers. Senior police officials, whose former chief was the deposed minister of interior Goma, have also pledged their allegiance to Sadat.

Meanwhile, Egyptian officials have held a round of meetings with leaders and representatives of several Arab states, presumably for the purpose of briefing them on the latest changes. Sudan and Syria have issued statements of support. In Tel Aviv, Israeli Defense Minister Dayan assessed developments in Egypt as "very significant," but added that he did not believe that the upheaval was related to Cairo's policy toward Israel. The Soviet press has carried a factual account of the situation without comment.

There is no evidence to support press reports that Moscow has suspended military and economic assistance to Cairo, or that it has recalled merchant ships en route to Alexandria with military cargoes. Soviet seaborne military deliveries to Egypt during April and the first half of May have been steady, although below the levels in February and March when the Soviets were delivering additional advanced equipment to improve Egypt's air defenses.

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COMMUNIST CHINA

In The President's Daily Brief of 14 May we reported the favorable impact in Japan of some deft diplomacy by the political leader of the visiting Communist Chinese ping pong team. The Chinese also seem to be making a special effort to be friendly to the Malaysians and the Filipinos.

A Malaysian trade delegation was recently accorded a warm reception in Peking, including a meeting with Chou En-lai. The visit followed several months of diplomatic gesturing by both Kuala Lumpur and Peking. The Chinese handling of the visit--including the use of the term Malaysia without quotes for the first time in official media--suggests Peking's first implicit acceptance of the legitimacy of the almost eight-year-old federation.

A private Filipino trade delegation was also received by Chou En-lai in Peking last week, and Chou is reported to have commented on the possibility of developing closer relations with Manila. Peking extended typhoon relief aid to the Philippines last November and has been refraining from direct attacks on President Marcos in its official media.

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INDIA-PAKISTAN

The US consulate general in Dacca has received a growing number of reports that the Pakistani Army is systematically searching out and killing Hindu males in East Pakistan.

This may be part of a plan to rid East Pakistan as completely as possible of the Hindu community which the army considers to be a subversive element. There were at least ten million Hindus in East Pakistan before the military crackdown in late March; the army may hope that a campaign of terror against them will force most to flee to India.

These reports do not augur well for relations between Hindu and Muslim communities in neighboring Indian states. The refugee influx, which now exceeds 2.6 million and is continuing at the rate of 100,000 persons daily, has already generated friction between local residents and refugees, many of whom are Muslim. News of fresh atrocities against Hindus in East Pakistan could spark savage communal violence that Indian authorities would find hard to control.

The Indians are also worried that the refugee camps will become centers of discontent vulnerable to leftist agitation, thereby aggravating the already serious problem posed by Naxalite extremists in eastern India.

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NOTE

USSR: A Soviet submarine tender currently about 900 miles southwest of the Canary Islands appears to be heading toward the Caribbean and could arrive in Cuba late this week. The tender has been in the Mediterranean and is the same ship that was operating in Cuban waters until early April.

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On the military front, government forces today abandoned a base on the northern Bolovens Plateau--Ban Houei Sai--in the face of stiff enemy pressure. Nearby, the town of Paksong has been entered by Communist troops, and Lao commanders on the scene see little hope of holding Paksong without massive air support. This is the first time Paksong has been attacked by the Communists, although it has been mentioned as a potential target for several years. In addition to being at one time the largest population center on the Bolovens, Paksong was used by the Communists to purchase foodstuffs and other goods.

An offensive on the Bolovens has been expected for several weeks, although government commanders thought that there might be further delay because of recent Pathet Lao defections in the area. It appears to be part of a wider Communist offensive in South Laos, that is also targeted against government positions farther north near Dong Hene along Route 9. The situation there has been relatively quiet for the past several days, but the Communists are making preparations for offensive operations.

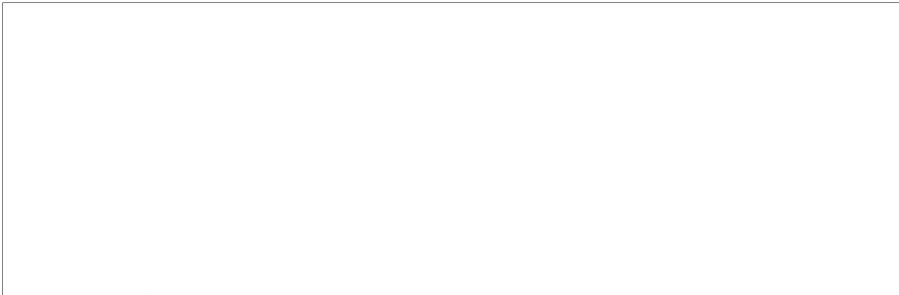
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LAOS

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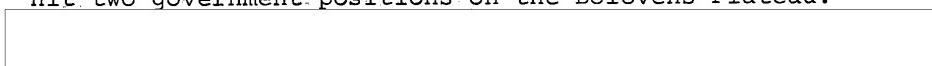
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On the military front, the Communists early today
hit two government positions on the Bolovens Plateau.

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SUNDAY CABLE
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EGYPT

The atmosphere in Cairo two days after the purge remains untroubled and Sadat still appears to have the situation well in hand. It is now clear that all of the principals in the shakeup as well as a number of members of the Arab Socialist Union and lesser government officials have been either jailed or placed under house arrest. In so doing, Sadat has moved swiftly to prevent any counter-moves from his opponents. His actions undoubtedly had at least the tacit blessing of the military. One of the purposes of his trip to the Canal Zone on Wednesday may have been to ensure the indispensable backing of his key command-level officers.

Popular reaction in support of Sadat continues. Cairo radio reported yesterday that various groups of citizens were demonstrating in the capital and other parts of the country throughout the day.

Meanwhile, Egyptian officials have held a round of meetings in the past few days with representatives from several Arab states, presumably for the purpose of explaining the latest changes in Cairo. In Tel Aviv, Israeli Defense Minister Dayan assessed developments in Egypt as "very significant" but expressed his belief that the upheaval was not related to Cairo's policy toward Israel. The Soviet press has carried a factual account of the situation without comment.

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